



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



*Rewarding Learning*

# GCSE subject criteria for music

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## Introduction

1. GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in music. They provide the framework within which an awarding body creates the detail of the specification.
2. Specifications must also meet the regulators' general requirements, including the common and GCSE criteria as defined in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA/04/1293).
3. Subject criteria are intended to:
  - help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
  - ensure that the rigour of GCSE is maintained
  - ensure that specifications build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established by the national curricula for England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and facilitate progression to higher level general or vocational qualifications in music or related sectors of education, employment and training
  - help higher education institutions, employers and other stakeholders such as learners and parents/guardians know what has been studied and assessed.
4. Any GCSE specification that contains significant elements of music must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## Aims and learning outcomes

5. GCSE specifications in music should encourage learners to be inspired, moved and changed by following a broad, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study and to develop broader life-skills and attributes including critical and creative thinking, aesthetic sensitivity, emotional awareness, cultural understanding, self-discipline, self-confidence and self-motivation. They should prepare learners to make informed decisions about further learning opportunities and career choices.
6. GCSE specifications in music must enable learners to:
  - actively engage in the process of music study in order to develop as effective and independent learners and as critical and reflective thinkers with enquiring minds

- develop their own musical interests and skills including the ability to make music individually and in groups
- evaluate their own and others' music
- understand and appreciate a range of different kinds of music.

## **Subject content**

7. The content of GCSE specifications in music must reflect the learning outcomes.
8. Specifications should reflect cultural diversity.
9. GCSE specifications in music must require learners to develop their ability in performing/realising and composing, and their listening/appraising skills.
10. GCSE specifications in music must require learners to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:
  - the use of musical elements, devices, tonalities and structures
  - the use of resources, conventions, processes, music technology and relevant notations including staff notation
  - the contextual influences that affect the way music is created, performed and heard including the effect of different intentions, uses, venues, occasions, available resources and the cultural environment.
11. Learners must develop their aural perception, musical skills, and the knowledge and understanding described in paragraph 10 through a contrasted range of three to six areas of study. An area of study could be based on a musical device, a musical process, a contextual influence, a specific genre or a specific style.
12. For each area of study the specification must identify clearly the particular aspects of musical knowledge and understanding from paragraph 10 that are to be studied. The range within or across areas must include music from the past and present, from the western classical tradition and other world cultures.
13. A specification must require learners to make connections between the three aspects of musical knowledge and understanding described in paragraph 10.

## Assessment objectives

14. All specifications in music must require candidates to demonstrate their aural perception, musical skills, knowledge and understanding through:

Assessment objectives		% weighting
AO1	Performing skills: performing/realising with technical control, expression and interpretation	30–40
AO2	Composing skills: creating and developing musical ideas with technical control and coherence	30–40
AO3	Listening and appraising skills: analysing and evaluating music using musical terminology	30–40

15. The three assessment objectives are interrelated and links between them must be recognised and reflected in the scheme of assessment.

## Scheme of assessment

16. GCSE specifications in music must allocate a weighting of 40% to external assessment and a weighting of 60% to controlled assessment in the overall scheme of assessment.

17. All areas of study (as described in paragraph 10) must be assessed. Two areas of study must be assessed through both AO3 and another assessment objective. The scheme of assessment must ensure that the highest grades are accessible by those candidates who may not receive additional specialist music lessons.

18. With regard to performing activities, each scheme of assessment must define how the level of technical demand of the music performed is to be recognised through the assessment. Assessment information specific to the type of instrument or voice being offered must be included.

19. Question papers must be targeted at the full range of GCSE grades.

## Grade descriptions

20. Grade descriptions are provided to give a general indication of the standards of achievement likely to have been shown by candidates awarded particular grades. The descriptions must be interpreted in relation to the content in the specification; they are not designed to define that content.
21. The grade awarded will depend in practice upon the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of candidates' performance in the assessment may be balanced by better performances in others.
22. At each grade, candidates must demonstrate aural perception and musical skills, knowledge and understanding as described in sections 10–11 above.

Grade	Description
A	<p>Candidates explore the expressive potential of musical resources and conventions used in selected genres and traditions. They perform/realise with a sense of style, have command of the resources they use and make appropriate gradations of tempo, dynamics and balance.</p> <p>They compose music that shows a coherent and imaginative development of musical ideas and consistency of style, and explore the potential of musical structures and resources.</p> <p>They make critical judgements about their own and others' music, using an accurate and extensive musical vocabulary.</p>
C	<p>Candidates perform/realise music with control, making expressive use of phrase and dynamics appropriate to the style and mood of the music.</p> <p>They compose music that shows an ability to develop musical ideas and use conventions, and explore the potential of musical structures and resources.</p>

	<p>They make critical judgements about their own and others' music, using a musical vocabulary.</p>
F	<p>Candidates perform/realise music with some fluency and control of the resources used.</p> <p>They compose music that shows some ability to organise musical ideas and use appropriate resources in response to a brief.</p> <p>They describe musical features using a simple musical vocabulary, make improvements to their own work and offer some justification of the opinions they express.</p>